Civil Society and the Contradictions of Organised Space: the Case of Favelas in Rio

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Resumo:

A separação neopositivista entre teoria e método prejudica o potencial da investigação qualitativa na administração (Jack & Westwood, 2006) e reforça os fundamentos ontológicos e epistemológicos tradicionais do campo que legitimam apenas uma organização burocrática de-espacializada como o modelo para a maioria das teorias que informam os estudos em organizações. Em contrapartida, nas últimas décadas observa-se uma produção acadêmica cada vez maior a respeito sobre o papel do espaço nas organizações. Dessa forma, torna-se aparente a realização de modelos ideais de organização que podem ser relacionados aos projetos hegemônicos ou alternativos de produção do espaço. Em especial, a análise do espaço político-econômico (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 104) revela estruturas de exclusão e segregação que se de um lado são mediadas pelas organizações, por outro revelam também experiências de resistência que se manifestam por meio de práticas de organização alternativas. Em função das relações contraditórias com a cidade, favelas representam um contexto ideal para ilustrar essa tensão entre a homogeneização (alienante) e diferenciação (apropriação) nas forças na produção do espaço organizado. Este artigo apresenta o caso das organizações de Sociedade Civil em favelas para demonstrar que estas organizações mediam relações contraditórias com o espaço e constantemente questionam as estruturas sobrepostas que os define. A geração de dados consistiu em uma observação participante realizada em uma favela do Rio de Janeiro.

Palavras-chave: *espaço, território, favelas, resistência*

Área temática: *GT-21 Organizações Alternativas e Contra Hegemônicas*

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1. Introduction

After one year away from my home country (Brazil), I came back to a favela I was familiar with in Rio to a series of interviews with people I still had to locate and involve in my research on civil society organisations. On the first day of this journey, I entered the territory with confidence and – what I later acknowledged to be – negligence. Judging to know well the place (what would be difficult even without the long period of absence) I took a wrong path and got lost. When I was trying to find my way out, I crossed a young man seated (appearing to be 18 years old) who stared at me. Realizing I had reached a dead-end street, I turned and saw this same boy now standing with his arms crossed, and a threatening gaze with sharp eyes. He asked me "- are you lost?", to which I responded "- where is street X please?". He then said with a fierce tone and slangy way, while projecting his head towards me: "- you are inside the faveeeeela, man". Without changing my timbre, I responded: "- sorry, I was visiting *FavelaOrg* (a local organisation)". Slowing down his tone, he reacted "Straight ahead this way, next time take the moto-taxi!", while staring at me walking away.

Two things captured my mind in the following days, after the scare faded. The first one was how mentioning the organisation name triggered in him an acceptance of my presence there. I didn't even have to prove that I was indeed where I said I was, but probably an outsider being there visiting that organisation was a likely scenario for him to believe. The other thing, and above everything else, how symbolic and representative was his speech, informing me I was inside a slum. He certainly did not want to teach me the obvious, i.e. where I was, but to imply that I could never be walking by myself inside that territory. That was his territory, their territory. And even though it is formally and legally a public space, in which any citizen could go any time of day they want, it is certainly something that nobody would do unless they had a very good reason for that. Space is, thus, a key category here: by means of the tacit forbiddance of me being in that space alone, and the material empowerment such space provoked in that young man. So, for the sake of analysing the space of organisations, I needed to explore the geographic processes that create such a separation between my social space and that boy's.

Incorporating space to the organisational analysis challenges the neopositivist separation of theory and method that still undermines the potential of qualitative research in management

(Jack & Westwood, 2006) and problematizes the traditional ontological and epistemological grounds of the field that recognizes a space-less bureaucratic organisation as the model for most theories that inform management scholars. The spatial turn observed in the field of organisation studies in the past decades led to an increasing production on space and organisations that respond to calls produced by breaking works in the area (Baldry, 1999; Dale & Burrell, 2008; Kornberger & Clegg, 2003). However, almost all the empirical investigations can be roughly divided in researches in/about the workplace or transient organising. In this field, the attention to the *political economy of space* (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 104) has been surprisingly scarce. I argue that the analysis of the political economy space uncovers structures of exclusion and segregation which are mediated by organisations, and reveal experiences of resistance that are manifested by alternative organising practices.

Favelas are arguably an ideal context to illustrate the tension between the homogenising (alienating) and differentiating (appropriating) forces in the production of the organised space. They represent an inherent contradiction of capitalist production, and in the hegemonic discourse of the formal city they bear a status of illegality (Lacerda, 2015; Magalhães, 2013). This illegality enables the production of an alternative organisation of the space (Imas & Weston, 2012), one that is not explained by the hegemonic representation of the capitalist world, and which can illuminate important political issues that are currently marginalised in management studies, such as the roles of organisations beyond work relations. Conducting the research in a space of favela also contributes to the inversion of colonial relations enacted in the city and established in the research field of MOS (Cooke, 2004), such as the appropriation of management as a modernizing absolute instrument of power.

This paper will review the literature on space and organisations to contextualise the importance of working with the sociology of organisational space and discuss alternative 'spaces' of theory. I will present the case of Civil Society Organisations (henceforth, CSOs) in favelas (Brazilian slums) to demonstrate that these organisations engender contradictory relations with space constantly interrogating the overlapping structures that defines them. The generation of data consisted of participatory observation performed in a favela I was already familiar with. During ten weeks, I interviewed, observed and worked with members of various organisations in this favela, mostly residents. This document will present the preliminary findings of this study.

2. The organization of space

Existing literature on space

The process of drawing boundaries in academic fields is a fluid proposition, and should account border zones instead of border lines – to use a spatial terminology inspired by the territorial nature of knowledge boundaries in organisation studies (Hughes, 2013). I purport to identify here two aspects of mutual influence in the works that apply the concept of space to organisations, and which will be explained below: the common interest in spatial aspects of power and control, and the interrogation of the boundaries of organisations.

An important aspect of the literature of space and organisation is the use of this framework to scrutinize issues of power and control. Space is imbued with power relations in that the social production of space requires the exercise of power, and in the analysis of space, elements of individual control and resistance are often revealed. The use of spatial frameworks can be particularly useful in understanding, for example, how the design of workspaces results in many implications of control for its users/workers (Dale, 2005; Panayiotou & Kafiris, 2011; Wapshott & Mallett, 2012) or how the construction and demarcation of spaces is also a process of privileging certain places and excluding others (Fahy, Easterby-Smith, & Lervik, 2014; Hancock & Spicer, 2011).

Almost all the literature relating space to issues of power and control is limited to the examination of the workplace and commodified work relations. In effect, most works still focus on the building and the architectural forms of organisation, which continues to be nonetheless a highly overlooked aspect of the mainstream of organisation studies (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1435). However, there are other types of relations involving organisations that realize similar processes of production of space, and are also implicated in the construction of social space. In that regard, another group of studies on space examined alternative forms of organisation and discussed the issue of organisational boundaries, although largely overlooking issues of power.

Exploring aspects of organisational boundaries is another strong contribution of the application of space in organisational analysis. Boundaries can be defined – or rather enacted – in the various dimensions of social life, such as the boundaries of material access, the limits of organisational norms, the restraints on mobility, or the organisational influence on private life (Ewalt & Ohl, 2013; Ford & Harding, 2004; Loacker & Sliwa, 2015). Current studies on organisational boundaries are largely dominated by the perspective of space as a processual

activity (hence, 'spacing'), which has been popular in organisation studies in the past years. These approaches advocate the understanding of space as necessarily bound by lived experience, through embodied actions. This standpoint rejects contrasting views of space on the grounds that they would be considered 'representational' of a static space, and advocates instead the adoption of a "performatic" realization of space (Beyes & Steyaert, 2011; Jones, McLean, & Quattrone, 2004; Lindberg & Czarniawska, 2006). Despite the inspiring empirical accounts for the comprehension of an embodied space, such investigations could easily underestimate the importance of power on the determination of social materiality, and while they focus on the transience of organisations, they limit the understanding of the longstanding nature and implications of its practices.

Among the various possible constructs used to refer to space, territory and place are largely adopted. Place is largely associated to the construction of individual meaning and identity, and it has been applied through its processes of place-making. The concept of territory, relating to the bordered spaces, is often explored in terms of its territoriality, that is spheres of autonomy and influence, or related processes, such as territorialisation. Examples of the use of territorial organisations beyond the analysis of space as a lived experience come from outside the Anglophone world. Misoczky, Camara, Cerqueira & Coto (2012) discussed the class-struggle taking place in the city, presenting a case in which territories of resistance emerged from previous territories of consumption when market dictated the access to the space. Coimbra and Saraiva (2013) carried out an investigation of organisational territoriality and argued that organisations operate fundamentally in a territorial dynamic, which allows the mechanisms of bordering to emerge. The perspective adopted by both studies to the construction of territory depicts the meaning of territoriality as associated with the human activity of organising space in spheres of influence.

In this paper, I am particularly interested in how civil society organisations exist beyond their workplace, and how the actions of these organisations that are shaped by social relations on various levels produce longstanding effects in their organising space. Hence, I will explore the *political economy of the 'organisation of space'* (Dale & Burrell, 2008, p. 142), which concerns the production of space observed through political and economic processes of organisation. The 'organisation of space' conveys, thus, the relationships amongst different organisations. This focus will allow me to expand the contributions that the literature of space can give to the analysis of CSOs, by looking at the relations between organisations and

exploring the structural relations of society manifested in the organised actions of civil society. In order to do that, my point of departure is the theory of Milton Santos.

The contribution of Milton Santos

In his main work, Santos (2006, p. 63) proposed a condensed definition for space which epitomizes his theoretical propositions: "an indivisible, integral and also contradictory set of systems of objects and systems of actions, not taken in isolation but as a unique scenario in which history unfolds". This idea puts in every action or object that constitutes a particular space the manifestation of every other spatial reality, which could be manifested in agreement or opposition, but are in any case inseparable. This relational thinking, which as described above is also present in Harvey (2008) and Lefebvre (1991), presupposes the idea of totality, which Milton Santos proposes as a less philosophical system of concepts, limiting the observation of the 'total social fact' to the object of geography. He argues that for the first time we live an 'empirical universality' (Santos, 2000), which allows for a new focus on the theme, examining the movement from the universal to the particular and back from an empirical standpoint. For Santos (2006, p. 74), according to the idea of totality it is not the sum of parts that explains the whole, but on the contrary the whole explains the parts. Totality is the reality in its entirety, and the result of a process of 'totalisation', which changes reality through the differentiation and integration of places.

In analysing the different grounds that guide the transformation of territory, Santos (2006) describes two different forms of new places produced in the territory: horizontality and verticality. He uses these two notions to oppose the actions in territory according to their motivations and ends. *Horizontality* is the domain of contiguity, of those neighbouring places connected by a territorial continuity, whereas *verticality* would be formed by points distant from each other, connected by all kind of social forms and processes:

> On one side, there are extensions shaped by points which aggregate without any discontinuity, as in the traditional definition of region. These are the horizontalities. On the other hand, there are points in space that, separated from each other, assure the global functioning of society and economy. These are the verticalities. Space is composed by both arrangements, inseparably. (Santos, 2006, p. 192, my translation)

Verticality may be theoretically associated with the construction of the abstract space of capitalism(Lefebvre, 1991), which is imbued by the logic of accumulation (the world of

commodities) that overruns social bonds and distorts the space of familiarity. It happens where the political control of production promotes an external planning process that connects each locality with outsider needs. As highlighted by Santos, this brings important instruments for the operation of a centralised economy. Conversely, horizontality would be the process of preserving and linking the space of familiarity, integrating the social space. It consists of points and actions that are continuous in geographic space, produced when the main concern of the actions is the local interests of inhabitants.

These phenomena in the territory are supported on a lower scale by actions that direct on the one hand their flows towards the local space, and on the other hand actions that direct their flows towards the outside. However, although these two vectors may imply a dichotomist analysis of space, most times relating to the opposition between the local/particular and the global/absolute, the resulting spaces are not absolute and convey more the process of transformation than the transformed places. This framework will be applied to the case of CSOs in favelas.

3. Research Methods: the case of Mucuripe

Favelas in Rio cover hills and mountains, and the construction of houses doesn't follow any planned landmark. Ingenuous low cost building solutions enable the expansion of the built area to house relatives. As a result, the high density of occupation lead to intense social relations and winding pathways and roadways emerge from an adventitious design, preventing the circulation of cars in most of the territory. Within this complicated geography, drug dealers found for decades a perfect hideout for their illegal trade. Since 2009, state programs have been involved in an attempt to integrate these territories to the institutional life of city (for critical analyses of the kind of integration that is aimed see Barbosa, 2012; Fleury, 2012; Lacerda, 2016). The Pacification Police Units program (UPP = Unidades de Policia Pacificadora) consists of a two-staged occupation process implemented in each favela chosen to be 'pacified', which means the military occupation of the territory followed by the consolidation of control by the State. However, this process is still non hegemonic, and favelas are thus produced by the conformation of power struggles involving drug dealers, the increasing influence of the market, and the military and civil presence of the state. The array of influences competing the regulation of these territories has a direct influence in the everyday of CSOs.

This research is included in the domain of critical management studies and hence embraces a reflexive methodology. This is a qualitative research intended to explore in-depth the organising space of CSOs, and for that adopts a participatory approach. It is a case study which draws some inspiration from ethnography and action research, in that it is based on data generated collaboratively during the engagement with the work and social reality of individuals in the field. It focuses in a favela, which I call here *Mucuripe*, located in the hillside of Rio, as are the vast majority of the other favelas of the city. According the 2010 census, the territory houses 10,000 dwellers divided in two main communities: Buruti and Itaperi.

I had contributed with one of the organisations operating at Buruti for many years, and cultivated accesses to perform the fieldwork, which was ethno-methodologically informed through participatory observation and interviews. The main data collection took place during 10 weeks, during which I worked in two organisations performing activities, attending their meetings, and interviewing people involved to related practices and events. During this process, I interacted with many other organisations which were part of overlapping networks and operated in the same territory.

4. Preliminary findings

There are many ways an organisation can shape the territory. FavelaOrg, for example, is an open-air museum that uses the houses' walls as canvas for painting representations of the history of the favela. It makes direct and material interventions in the space, with depictions of local history, which changes the landscape and informs local dwellers about the history of the territory. FavelaOrg proposes that their museum is not formed only from the material artefacts but from the whole territory of the favela, and during their guided visit they emphasize they are more than an open-air museum: a live museum. In that instance, the other objects of that landscape, and even people, become artefacts of that visiting experience. But whereas it is easy to perceive the impact of many of these straightforward interventions, less obvious mechanisms of space production are revealed in the everyday spatial practices of FavelaOrg, such as in the example below.

FavelaOrg controls a relatively spacious terrace for events which is rarely used. They decided, thus, to sublet the terrace for family parties and social events, which would contribute a required service to the community and generate a new revenue stream to the

organisation. One of the days I was there, I saw a woman coming to see the terrace and talking to Victor (the administrator) afterwards. She was complaining about the bureaucratic process for letting the space (she needed to bring documents, fill in a form and talk to one of the directors for approval) and about the terms and conditions imposed for using the terrace. With a pedagogical tone, Victor explained: "Do you live here? I'm from the favela as well. We know how the parties are in here, don't we? So, you need to talk to someone who will explain you all the rules". When he returned, Victor was telling me that he was of the opinion that too much philanthropy for too long had made residents used to receiving things with no effort and in the way they wanted.

It is true that parties at favelas – even family parties – usually go on noisily over the whole night, and also that their residents have for a long time been the target of many philanthropic programs, from various types of organizations. But it is hard to discuss the controversial questions of whether favelas are really receivers of "too much philanthropy" or not, or yet whether their residents are spoiled or victims. Whichever the case, what was significant in this example were the differences of understanding between Victor and the applicant about the rules and regulations for the use of a public space, and consequently the power of the organisation to re-orient the practices and habits of residents. By controlling a scarce resource in the territory (party hall), FavelaOrg conditioned the access to this resource to adjusting and complying with the regulations on noise limits, safety measures, etc., and thus structured the territory of the favela.

FavelaOrg promoted artistic interventions based on the history of favela, and reinforced the regulation of the social space using their resources. The organisation was, thus, coordinating systems of actions (requirements for letting the space and arts exhibition) and systems of objects (such as the hall and the dwellers' houses) to establish order in space according to the needs of the territory. In that way, this CSO was the centre of its own actions, transforming the territory from within. Santos (1999) calls 'horizontality' similar types of organisation of space, or what he calls "territorial cutting". As described above, horizontality is formed by places contiguous to the flows of production, which are directed towards the territory.

Most of FavelaOrg's realizations had been enabled by governmental funding granted on the basis of an innovative cultural proposition. This source of funding was limited and unstable, and for that reason one year before the start of my fieldwork, members of FavelaOrg had decided that the visit to the walls they painted ("canvas-wall") was their main "service", and one that should eventually provide the "financial sustainability" of the organisation. But

despite the good feedback from visitors, the number of visits was still extremely low – twice a month – for the intended financial outcomes. They establish a partnership with a "researcher of tourism markets" from a federal university. The researcher explained to them that the price charged for the visit was too high for a museum ticket, and she suggested to change the name of the service from "visit the museum" to "favela-tour", which was a type of service the "market" was more likely to pay a higher price for. The website was then updated according to this "market-oriented" discourse.

But a name is never only a name, and the term favela-tour had a strong meaning attached, linked to commodification of the favela. A favela tour is a touristic attraction widely associated with the voyeur entertainment of turning poverty into a commodity, for visitors who often look to confirm negative stereotypes produced in films about favelas (Freire-Medeiros, 2011), which they bring inside the territory. In contrast, visiting the history of the favela through art works was supposed to be a space and time of de-colonial encounter, when visitors could learn from the favela and in the favela. The offer of a commoditised service would thus include contractual expectations generated in the market place that were not conceived when FavelaOrg was created.

As illustrated above, the reproduction of abstract forms of managerial knowledge and prejudicial descriptions of the favela emptied the organisation of its political content bore by the meaning they attribute to the organisations. Santos (1999) describes this type of organisation of space, or in his terms this "territorial cutting", and calls it 'verticality'. As described above, verticality is formed by actions that displace the existing meanings in the territory to incorporate distant flows of production. The mechanisms of accommodation of representations of the abstract space influence different organisations differently according to the event. And even the same organisation such as FavelaOrg can react differently according to the event. CSOs in the favela are to a great extent regulated and conditioned by the market, the state, the drug barons, other than by the communitarian demands, and they negotiate this contingence producing contradictory spaces.

5. Concluding Remarks

This paper discussed the space of civil society organisations in favelas, in particular the actions of CSOs and their spatiality in the context of favelas, and interrogated the interfaces and interactions that shape and delimit these (alternative) spaces. The chapter showed that the

same organisations might have contradictory actions depending on the event, according to the place motivating the action. The actions of individuals and organisations in each analysed event were not necessarily integral to the same geographic space, even though they were all selected on the basis of their materiality in the same territory of Favela Mucuripe.

Organisations in favelas do not produce a completely different (alternative) space from what surround them, as much as they try to conciliate different dominant spaces - such as market vs. community or state vs. criminality - being not fully part of any of them. In that sense, they assume an interstitial (and contradictory) ontological condition, responding to the context of a contested space in favelas. Whereas CSOs can also be seen as social agencies that engage in various organisational networks to shape space, these organisations don't have what Yeung (1998, p. 104) called a priori 'modes of rationality'. Instead, they will operate using different logics, or acting on different intentionality, according to the event. Thus, each happening could be contradictory to each other, and the ensemble of actions would still define the same single organisation.

Rather than assuming that organisations are 'fluid' and may behave differently in every instant, I demonstrated here that various established spaces dispute the influence in the actions of these organisations, which I framed here in two different structural arrangements, which engender order and lasting effects. First, cases of 'verticality', based on the reproduction of places distant from the territory, and then the possibility of 'horizontality', based on the organisation of local needs and practices.

This paper emphasized that either reproducing external places or crafting new ones, organisations are always the bearers of territoriality and agents of transformation. In this process, they reproduce contiguous/local places when they engage with the available techniques of the territory, which in the examples above were driven by the domain of cultural and sport practices in the favela. In contrast, CSOs reproduce hierarchical/abstract places when they are forced to adopt the space of their donors or funders, and the adopted techniques follow the instrumental use of the space which is disconnected from local needs. These contrasting behaviours can be observed in the same organisation at different events.

Therefore, CSOs at Mucuripe are not producers of specific and pre-determined territorialities. The same organisation (e.g. FavelaOrg) might construct different places (e.g. local history of favelas vs. abstract space of capitalism) according to the organisational event (e.g. painting walls with local historiography vs. changing the name to favela tour). It was in the analysis of

particular events that the places CSOs were integral to became apparent, and distinct places could be observed in the territory with the mediation of these organisations. The relations that CSOs establish with their surrounding space are characterized by their engagement in contradictory actions, and rather than fixating in the indeterminacy of the organisational space, I argued that these actions are driven by the contradictory places that motivate them, and which can only be comprehended when considered as part of a 'totality'.

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